

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A4NEW YORK TIMES
24 December 1985

CONGRESS RESISTS CONTRA ARMS AID

Administration Soundings on Renewal Are Said to Draw a Negative Response

By SHIRLEY CHRISTIAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 23 — The Reagan Administration's efforts to sound out Congress about the prospects for restoring military aid to Nicaraguan rebels have drawn negative responses over the last several weeks, according to some key legislators.

"My perception is that at this stage it would be very difficult for them to get military assistance," Representative Dave McCurdy, Democrat of Oklahoma, said today.

Mr. McCurdy, who played a leading role in fashioning the \$27 million non-military aid package approved last July, added, "I think there could be a continuance of humanitarian aid."

Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota and chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said in an interview last week that he was not ruling out military aid but thought it was "premature for the Administration to think of escalating or changing the compact."

Spending authority for the \$27 million runs out on March 31, and the Administration has said it will formally bring up the issue in Congress in the first months of 1986.

Abrams Meets Legislators

President Reagan began the campaign in his radio address on Dec. 14 with a tough attack on the Sandinista regime.

"If Nicaragua can get material support from Communist states and terrorist regimes and prop up a hated Communist dictatorship, should not the forces fighting for liberty, now numbering over 20,000, be entitled to more effective help?" he asked.

Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, talked privately in the last two weeks with a number of senators and representatives, both Democrats and Republicans, in an effort to determine what kind of new aid program could count with a Congressional majority.

According to various legislators and staff aides, he asked about attitudes toward overt military aid, a return to a program run by the Central Intelligence Agency, or renewal of the aid that now covers food, medicine, boots, clothing and other nonlethal supplies. Mr. Abrams concentrated his efforts among members of Congress who had voted for the \$27 million last summer.

"They need to get a reading of how far they can go in their request," said a spokesman for Representative Michael D. Barnes, the Maryland Democrat who is chairman of the Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee in the House.

'Diplomatic Approach' Favored

Mr. Barnes, who was not visited by Mr. Abrams, continues to prefer "to do away with the whole contra oriented policy and try a diplomatic approach," the spokesman said. The Nicaraguan rebels are generally known as contras.

"Whether we have the votes to beat what they ask for depends upon what they ask for," Mr. Barnes added.

One of the arguments the Administration has made for resuming a program directed by the C.I.A. is that it would help to resolve the problems encountered in getting the aid through Honduras to the rebel camps on the border and inside Nicaragua.

The Honduran Government, which publicly maintains the position that it is not aware of the use of its border as a rebel rest and supply area, began to block shipments from landing there after a television crew arrived on a supply flight on Oct. 10.

The Administration has implied that the C.I.A. could make the necessary transport arrangements privately and without the press attention given to the present aid disbursement, which is directed by the State Department.